

Observations on the slaves and the indented servants, inlisted in the army, and in the navy of the United States. The resolves of Congress, for prohibiting the importation of slaves, demonstrates the consistent zeal of our rulers in the cause of mankind ... [Signed] Antibastes. Philadelphia, August 14, 1777. [Philadelphia Printed by Styner and Cist. 1777].

OBSERVATIONS on the SLAVES and the INDENTED SERVANTS, inlisted in the Army, and in the Navy of the United States.

THE Resolve of Congress, for prohibiting the importation of Slaves, demonstrates the consistent zeal of our rulers in the cause of mankind. They have endeavoured, as early and as extensively as it then was in their power, to reform our morals, by checking the progress of the general depravation, which, sooner or later, proves the ruin of the countries, where domestic slavery is introduced.

From the liberal spirit of that resolve, which, soon after, was most cheerfully supported by their constituents, it is natural to infer that, had not the necessity of repelling the hostilities of powerful invaders so deeply engaged the attention of the several legislative bodies of our Union, laws would, long since, have been made, with every precaution, which our safety might have dictated, for facilitating emancipations. Many Slaves, however, too many perhaps, are incautiously allowed to fight under our banners. They share in the dangers and glory of the efforts made by us, the freeborn members of the United States, to enjoy, undisturbed, the common rights of human nature; and THEY remain Slaves!

The exquisite sensibility, the enlightened equity of a free people, cannot suffer them to be ungrateful.—To stand indebted for the recovery of the least portion of our rights, to a race of men, whose unhappy lot must be to continue in a state of the most dishonour able degradation, would be too painful, too humiliating.—Have we not ourselves taught those men, on the most rational principles, and with all the energy which our feelings could give us, to execrate that state as unnatural, and contrary to the laws of God? Would public faith had been pledged to the Slaves, before they were permitted to fight in our cause, that their own liberty was one of the recompences, which they were to receive, for their courage and fidelity! It would have been a restitution, not a recompence, though policy, to conceal our blushes, should have suggested a name for it, which could not wound our pride.

Other States have likewise, on extraordinary emergencies, hazarded to employ Slaves in their wars; but immediate, or conditional emancipation was, at the same time, held up, and most religiously

bestowed on them, as the sacred retribution of gratitude. God forbid, we should act with less generosity and justice on similar occasions!

France, in the islands of Guadaloupe and Martinico, as well as Spain, in the island of Cuba, have, during the course of the last war, exhibited to us such laudable examples. The Slaves, whom they intrusted with arms, in the defence of their territories, were not only allowed to dispose of their whole pay as they thought fit, but indiscriminately partook of every other advantage given to the freeborn soldiers of their respective States. Britain knows, and we may remember, that these freedmen, animated by such encouragements, fought with the greatest intrepidity. They were remarkably faithful, and none of them deserted.—Were they not certain, that, had they been guilty of that crime, or had they been made prisoners of war, the enemy would have sold them, in the same manner that they sold the Slaves who fell into their hands? But the owners were indemnified by the State to which they belonged, for the loss they sustained, on account of their Slaves, who were emancipated for having assisted in its defence.

Neither the Slaves who bear arms for us, nor their owners, have, as yet, obtained such advantages from any of the United States. Our non-emancipated soldiers are almost irresistibly tempted to desert to our foes, who never fail to employ them against us. There, at least, besides the uncontrolled disposal of their whole pay, they have a chance for being gifted by the enemy, whom sound policy may inspire to be generous in this case, with that freedom, which our laws do not authorize them to claim as their reward from us, for whose liberty they daily expose their lives. It is true, that they are proportionally but few in the service; and yet, could we rest assured, that no great misfortune ever will arise from the want of benevolent resolves in their behalves, our domestic peace, and the jealousy of that honour which impels men to warlike achievements, would demand the most serious attention of the Congress, respecting the political existence of enlisted Slaves, or the propriety of excluding them from being at any time employed, as soldiers or seamen, in our wars.

There is in the army and navy of the United States another class of oppressed men, whose singular usefulness, were they interested to remain with us, and whose power to do us numberless injuries, if provoked to fly to the enemy for an asylum, are of the greatest importance at this juncture. Their education, national prejudices and attachments, the moral principles of a considerable part of them, and the opprobrious state to which they are all very unjustly degraded, cannot have been considered in their different points of view, before they were invited to enlist; otherwise, the possibility of many evils which the resolve, relative to them, portends, in its original tenor, would have been discovered, and consequently prevented.

The oppressed persons here meant, are, few of them excepted, Europeans, and born in the dominions of Great-Britain. They are those unhappy beings, whom the covetousness and treachery

of the British merchants, as well as the collusion of the British administration, have doomed, whether convicts or not, to temporary slavery amongst us, before we became free. Even now, these temporary Slaves are, to our dishonour! As remorselessly sold as the Africans, or their offspring; nay, the flagitiousness of the deed is aggravated by the mockery and hypocritical stile of the owners who advertise them for sale; who, ashamed of their own iniquitousness, vainly recur to subterfuges, that it may be extenuated in the minds of others—It is THE TIME, not THE BODY, or the *person*, of the indented servant, of either sex, which is TO BE SOLD! The body or person of such servant is, however, subjected, not by law, but connivance, to the wanton barbarity or lewd attempts of the purchaser. It is, in fact, as absolutely subjected as the body or person of a Negro, man or woman, who is sold as a *legal* Slave.—Can it be much longer suffered, in this land of freedom, thus to sport with human nature?

Now that we are an independent people, the dissoluteness and oppression, which are inseparable from that impious trade, will have but a very short duration. They must cease of themselves at the expiration of the limited terms of servitude, the longest of which can scarcely exceed four years, from this time; and but few of our brethren will so long groan under the scandalous yoke. It is therefore unreasonable to believe, and it would be excessively cruel to insinuate, that any other consideration prevailed on our Delegates, to deprive themselves and their constituents of the god-like pleasure of giving unconditional deliverance from slavery to all the men, women and children of European descent, who had been betrayed into it, and sold to us, by their European brethren. But pardonable as the omission may be, neither humanity nor self-love will let us reflect upon it without regret.

Oh! may we soon blot out the reproach which that neglect has justly rendered us liable to, since we abolished the novercal government of Britain! May we soon impart, at least to those victims, devoted by her degenerate and unnatural sons to temporary slavery, the same blessings, to the enjoyment of which we are now restored! Let us endear ourselves to them by acts of justice:—let our selfishness and severity no longer strengthen the prejudices of their education, nor induce them to behold us as their oppressors and enemies.

They have already been courted to enlist in our service; but, unhappily for us, as well as for them, the indemnification allowed to the masters, was not a gift to the redeemed servants—It was no more than a loan to them—They must discharge it out of their bounty money; and, if that be insufficient, out of their pay! An amazing number of these men eagerly seized the unexpected opportunity offered them, to rescue themselves from unlawful bondage; but the conditions on which they were to obtain their freedom, impressing no idea of gratitude on their minds, they determined to desert to the enemy, as soon as they could. In the mean while, most of them quickly disappeared from the

corps in which they inlisted. They afterwards re-inlisted, and deserted, as often as they found officers who, over-anxious to fill up their companies with greater expedition, or led by sordid motives, were less inquisitive than they ought to have been.

The treasury of the United States has been, by these means, spoliated of an immense sum: The extravagant stipulations received, and so easily acquired by such unprincipled recruits, who have been mustered as Substitutes, for exempting Militia men from being draughted, have been squandered, together with the bounty money, in the most flagrant riots; and the lowest kind of profusion has been exhibited all over our territories. That profusion is, perhaps, one of the principal causes, which have concurred in raising the spirit of extortion with such stupendous rapidity, and to that progressive height, in every part of the United States, that it must now be speedily forced down, to a degree which may admit some toleration.—And indeed, should our absurd complaisance to extortioners, that is to traitors, continue but a few weeks longer, we might experience far greater woes than those we could reasonably fear from the combined malice and power of Great-Britain, unassisted by our own rapaciousness or conspiracy.

The service of the Militia men who have already procured, or may hereafter procure, substitutes of the cast we have described, will be lost to the United States, during the war, or three years; for, the wording of the recommendatory resolve of the Congress declaring that two Militia men shall be exempted from being draughted, if they procure one mustered substitute, the abuses which result from the resolve, are striking.—Every State which has made laws corresponding with the recommendation, will have reason to repent their compliance, two men being reputed in actual service, even after the desertion of their substitute. They are legally represented, and consequently exempted from being draughted, during the whole term

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term stipulated in the inlistment of such deserted recruit.—Who can ascertain how many co-partnerships, consisting of the wealthy part of the indolent, or disaffected, may be legally entitled by a few mock-substitutes, to the exemption which the Congress meant to grant, for accelerating the completion of all the regiments on the new establishment, with effective soldiers?

But, the great reliance put on impunity, does infinitely greater injuries to our cause, than the pecuniary losses, fraudulent exemptions from personal service, or even the multiplied desertions, to all which we shall lie exposed, before several preventive resolves are issued, or during the operation of those which have been mentioned. The seducing prospect of the insuperable difficulties which obstruct legal conviction, presents itself to every dissolute man, employed on the recruiting service. The principles of a considerable part of the officers to whom that trust was committed, have been corrupted; and it is generally believed, that there are but few of them who have not, in some degree,

caught the fatal infection;—few of them, who have declined entering into lucrative bargains with Militia men who wanted substitutes;—few of them have conscientiously availed themselves of all the means, which honour and duty bound them to use, for hindering deserters from carrying on their enlisting trade with impunity;—few of them have scrupled to pollute their hands with the supplies, which innumerable circumstances amply afforded them, for repairing, without the least danger of detection, the losses incidental to gaming, or for gratifying the most licentious appetites. Many, but too many of them, alas! have countenanced fraud, desertion and perjury.

Had the enlisted Slaves been paid for, at the joint expense of the United States;—had it been declared to them, that they were to be free at the end of the war, or a certain period of faithful service in our army or navy;—had the white servants been freed at the same joint expense;—had all these redeemed soldiers and seamen, white or black, been granted their full pay, the same bounty money and proportion of land, which other men, inlisted in the land or sea service, are allowed—great advantages would have been derived from such munificence. But those advantages would have been entirely negative; and, for this reason, the emissaries of our foes would have questioned their reality, before the melancholy experience of the effects, which opposite measures have produced, convinced the most superficial observer, that our conduct ought to be altered.

It may not be too late for administering the best remedy. Wisdom and patriotism will point it out to our Delegates, as well as the best mode of application. But let the limits, within which they will think fit to circumscribe their beneficence, be what they may, it seems that a general emancipation of the Slaves, inlisted in the army, or in the navy, ought immediately to take place; that the white or black freedmen ought to be fully re-imbursed of the sums deducted from their bounty or pay, to discharge what the masters of the indented servants shall have received for redemption money, or to pay the owners of the inlisted Slaves, for hire, or otherwise.

To give these resolves the fullest efficacy, they should be accompanied with a FREE pardon to all the non-commissioned officers, soldiers and seamen, then in actual service, who, before a certain day, were guilty of desertion, as well as to other deserters, who, not being in the service, will surrender themselves within a limited time. An act of indemnity for military crimes, which have been committed before a certain day, by any military man, who was under the rank of a field-officer, in the land or sea service, should be proclaimed at the same time; but fraud, embezzlement, cowardice, treason, and crimes which are capital at common law, should be excepted, together with such other crimes, and such persons, as the Congress might think proper to except from the benefit of this pardon. Without that prudent act of clemency, which, perhaps, better than any other devise, will restore discipline in the army and navy, we shall have too many offenders to punish, or we must connive at the continuation of impunity, that is, in other words, at our own destruction.

If such like resolves be not soon adopted, and put into execution, we needlessly run great dangers, unless our redeemed soldiers and seamen, of whatever class or colour, be immediately discharged, and the Slaves for ever excluded from sharing in the honour of defending the Independence of the United States.

The fatal consequences attending the want of decisive resolutions on this momentous alternative, may be easily predicted by any person who reflects, that our implacable enemies are now opening the scene of their grand attack against us; an attack than which they have not yet made one more desperate against any nation. It may be objected that, should the Congress prefer the more generous part of the proposed resolution, the expense would be too considerable. It will certainly be great; but can it be imagined that impolitic œconomy ever can, with her contracted plans, supersede the claims of justice, or silence the loud warnings of alarmed safety, when consistent republicans are to pronounce?

We, the members of the United States, have been—we still are, the accomplices of the Britons. We have received great emoluments from their profligacy, their insidiousness and savage cruelty, since they first undertook the slave trade. Blinded by the most superstitious reverence and partial affection, before their relentless oppression reduced us to choose between rapine or death, we were but too unwilling to suspect that their principles and actions wanted rectitude. The illusion gradually diminished; but, though much weakened, it did not cease to operate in their favour, until, deliberately declaring in their manifesto, that they had withdrawn their national assistance and protection from us, they, THEMSELVES, dissolved the enchantment, our oaths, and all reciprocal obligations!

Having often manifested our willingness to expiate the crimes, which our political connexion with Britain involved us into, we ought to reprobate every suggestion which tends to palliate their enormity. We ought publicly to confess them, with the heaven-taught humility and contrition of reformed penitents. Such instances of magnanimity will prove that we are rising superiour to our former state. Let us therefore acknowledge that, had not our own cupidity and indolence prepared us for the seduction of the wily Britons, no—not all their sophistry could have deluded us.—We never would have been tempted by them to purchase the Slaves they brought to us from the African shore! Reason, nature and religion would have made us recoil at the horrid act; and we must have execrated the seducers. But, we bought the devoted Africans! We bought them—to fix slavery upon them and their posterity!

Insatiate with such distant prey, the British monsters prowled in their own country, and brought to us for sale, such of their unwary brethren whom they could seize upon. These too were our brethren

—but, “deaf to the voice of consanguinity,”^{*} we bought them; and numbers of them are still our Slaves!

** Declaration of Independence.*

Our complicity in those crimes was the joint guilt of the people who now compose the United States; let then the atonement be their joint act of piety. Let them produce fruits, that are worthy of their Independence, and convince Britain, that we really are that “VIRTUOUS PEOPLE” we have often declared ourselves to be. Before this can be clearly established by facts, her Parliament, never considering us as a formidable power, will remain persuaded, that our subjection to them is unavoidable, though it may be, for a long time, obstinately opposed by the generous, but insufficient efforts of a few enthusiastic patriots.

Philadelphia, August 14, 1777.

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